

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 01693 101207Z

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ACTION INR-07

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2833

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 1693

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: APER, MILI, MASS, LA

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF GENERAL OFFICER POSITION FOR DATT

1. I UNDERSTAND THAT A RECENT JCS STUDY RECOMMENDS THAT THE POSITION OF THE DEFENSE ATTACHE IN LAOS BE DOWNGRADED TO COLONEL AFTER JUNE 30, 1975. THIS ACTION WOULD BE MOST DISTURBING, COULD NOT COME AT A MORE INOPPORTUNE TIME, AND WOULD BE A SELF-INFLICTED BLOW TO OUR INTERESTS IN LAOS.

2. THE RATIONALE FOR ESTABLISHING A DEFENSE ATTACHE OFFICE IN LAOS AND PLACING IT UNDER THE COMMAND OF A GENERAL OFFICER REMAINS THE SAME TODAY AS IT DID IN AUGUST 1973. OUR ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT WAS A CRUCIAL UNDERPINNING FOR THE VIENTIANE SIDE DURING THE DIFFICULT PERIOD WHEN THE LAOS SETTLEMENT WAS BEING NEGOTIATED. A GENERAL OFFICER WAS ASSIGNED AS DATT, FIRST, TO BRING OUR ALL ENCOMPASSING MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM UNDER A SINGLE MANAGER AND, SECOND, AS A SIGN OF THE IMPORTANCE WE ATTACHED TO THE SURVIVAL OF THE RLGA AND THE VIENTIANE SIDE. THE ARMED FORCES OF THE RLGA (VIENTIANE SIDE) ARE TOTALLY DEPENDENT ON U.S. ASSISTANCE. THESE FORCES ARE THE ONLY ORGANIZED, CENTRALLY CONTROLLED ORGANIZATION ON THE VIENTIANE SIDE. THE SURVIVAL OF THE RLGA IS CRUCIAL TO MAINTAINING THE STRENGTH OF THE NON-COMMUNIST ELEMENTS OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT. THE ARMED FORCES PROVIDE
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THE ONLY COUNTERPOISE TO THE THREAT OF A PATHET LAO

TAKEOVER OF THE PGNU. IT IS IN OUR INTEREST TO DO
NOTHING WHICH WOULD SHAKE THE CONFIDENCE OF OUR FRIENDS.

3. ALL ARE AWARE OF THE TOUGH POLITICAL INFIGHTING
GOING ON HERE NOW, WITH THE EVER PRESENT THREAT OF
THE PATHET LAO TO USE FORCE. THE VIENTIANE SIDE IS
BADLY IN NEED OF REASSURANCE AT THIS TIME AND FOR
THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE HAS
BEEN REDUCED AND PATHET LAO POLITICAL SUCCESSES HAVE
UNDERMINED RLGAFF MORALE. WITHDRAWAL OF A GENERAL
OFFICER AT THIS TIME WOULD BE A BLOW TO THE VIENTIANE
SIDE AND COULD BE INTERPRETED AS A FURTHER INDICATION
OF ERODING U.S. SUPPORT.

4. I URGE THE DEPARTMENT TO DO ALL IT CAN TO REVERSE
ANY DEFENSE PROPOSAL TO DOWNGRADE THE DATT POSITION.
PERHAPS IN A YEAR THIS COULD BE REVIEWED AGAIN.
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